

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, September 25, 2007

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Detroit Free Press

Wayne County news briefs

September 25, 2007

CANTON: Hearing delayed in toddler's death

A hearing on whether the statements a Canton foster mother made to police about the death of a toddler in her care should be admitted at trial was postponed Monday until today.

Carol Poole is charged with felony murder, involuntary manslaughter and first-degree child abuse in the September 2006 death of 2-year-old Allison Newman.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Ulysses Boykin said the postponement was necessary in the "interest of justice." A court officer said he was investigating a heated exchange between the toddler's grandfather and Poole's defense attorney.



Baby breathing on her own

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

A Blackman Township baby who allegedly was beaten and raped by her father is breathing on her own in an Ann Arbor hospital.

"She is going to make it, but will have brain problems," Public Safety Deputy Director Jon Johnston said this morning.

The 3-month old girl has been hospitalized since Sept. 15 with 17 broken bones and brain damage, and was on a ventilator for more than a week. Police allege Kirk Coleman, 27, beat and sexually assaulted the baby. A preliminary hearing scheduled for today was postponed.

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Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

[Print Page](#)

Police seize meth equipment, five children from home

Tuesday, September 25, 2007 11:09 AM EDT

NILES - A Niles man, out of jail on probation for drug charges, was arrested Monday for a number of charges related to methamphetamine manufacturing and use.

On Monday at about 5 p.m., the Niles Police Department and Berrien County Sheriffs Narcotics Unit and Road Patrol served a search warrant for narcotics at 1010 Ferry St, Niles.

The Narcotics Unit had received a tip that methamphetamine was being produced at that address and, following further investigation, the Narcotics Unit obtained a search warrant for the residence.

When officers arrived, they found the suspect, Jessie Ray Kruger, 21, in the residence.

There were also five children, ages three months to 16 years old, in the residence, along with their grandmother.

Kruger, who was currently on parole for a previous drug conviction, was arrested and lodged in the Berrien County Jail pending arraignment on the charges listed.

Officers seized meth components and manufacturing equipment from a storage shed in the yard and also found evidence that meth had been manufactured in the basement of the residence.

In accordance with Michigan Dept. of Community Health requirements, Child Protective Services took the children into protective custody and provided a medical exam at the hospital.

The MDCH code also requires the Narcotics Unit to post the residence as uninhabitable.

Flint Journal

September 24, 2007

CAN A GENERAL MOTORS EMPLOYEE ON STRIKE HAVE THEIR CHILD SUPPORT LOWERED UNTIL THEY RESUME TO WORK?

Yes.

Both parents are obligated to support a minor child. MCL 722.3(1). A non custodial parent has an obligation to assist in the support of a child even if the custodial parent has sufficient income to meets the needs of the child without financial assistance. *Beverly v Beverly*, 112 Mich App 657, 371 NW2d 213 (1981)

The amount of child support recommended by the child support formula is presumed to be appropriate. *Calley v Calley*, 197 Mich App 380, 496 NW2d 305 (1992). According to the Friend of the Court Act the formula is to be based on the needs of the child and the actual resources of each parent. MCL 552.519 (3) (a) (vi). Before the formula can be used the net income of both parties must be calculated.

When a party voluntarily reduces or eliminates income the court concludes that the party has the ability to earn income and pay support, it is not error to order support based upon unexercised ability to earn. See *Ghidotti v Barber*, 459 Mich 189, 586 NW2d 883 (1998)

The Court may modify child support orders at any time. Support may be modified as the circumstances of the parents and the benefit of the children require. MCL 552.17(1), upon proper application to the court and due notice to the opposite party. MCL 552.455, for proper cause shown or because of change of circumstances. MCL 722.21 (1) (c).

The modification of child support orders is within the discretion of the court. *Wyzenkiewicz v Wyzenkiewicz*, 224 Mich 11, 194 NW 482 (1923)

The court may modify a judgement concerning the support and maintenance of the children as the circumstances of the parents and the benefit of the children require. MCL 552.17 (1). A party seeks a modification based upon a change in circumstances and therefore has the burden of establishing a change that would justify the requested modification. See *Aussie v Aussie*, 182 Mich App 454, 452 NW2d 859 (1990)

Change in circumstances does not have a single, hard and fast definition. The goal is to design an award to accord with the welfare of the child that is within the means and abilities of the supporting parent. *Hakken v Hakken*, 100 Mich App 460, 2987 NW2d 907 (1980).

The minimal threshold for modification is 10 percent or more of the existing order or \$25 per month, whichever is less. 2004 MCSF 1.07 (B).

If the parties do not agree on the modification and there are factual disputes, the court must hold an evidentiary hearing. *Baluch v Baluch* 180 Mich App 689, 447 NW2d 775 (1989). Parties abandon the right to an evidentiary hearing if they fail to assert it. *Mitchell v Mitchell* 198 Mich App 393, 499 NW2d 386 (1993).

Generally, payments due under a support order are not subject to retroactive modification: they may be modified only from the date that notice of a petition for modification was given to the party. MCL 552.603 (2)

In summary a striking worker seeking a child support reduction will have to file a petition to change support and pay a filing fee of \$100. In low income situations fees can be waived.

GM workers receive 85% of their when laid off. But only \$200.00 per week from a strike fund

Hypothetically A worker making \$25 per hour X 2080 hrs per year makes \$52,000 per year. 85% of that would be \$44,200. If they are the non custodial parent with one child and the custodial parent make minimum wage \$14,495 there would be a change in child support if the parties went to court.

The original order would be \$640.31 per month. The adjusted child support order would be \$576.40. This is a child support savings in the amount of \$63 per month. The filing fee is \$100. Attorney fees will vary from \$500 to \$1,000.

The numbers change dramatically during a strike where the workers only income is \$200 from a strike fund. The equivalent of \$10,400 per year. On these numbers child support would be \$67.84 per month. For a savings of \$571.48 per month on these facts. Times this by the number of months of a strike and the number will become quite large.

If the strike is a short one there will not be an immediate benefit. If the strike is long term and strike pay is exhausted the worker will face a huge child support arrearage, Friend of the Court enforcement actions along with the loss of income during the strike. Herein is the dilemma, when to file. I suggest filing now but set the first hearing out 60 days to make sure you will receive a benefit and preserve the effective date.

Call and make an appointment if you have additional child support questions
Terry Bankert
attorneybankert@yahoo.com

F.O.C. what a farce

Gaylord Herald Times

Posted: Tuesday, September 25, 2007 12:03 AM EDT

There once was this 17 year old teenager. He met a friends mother who seemed to like young boys barely old enough but just over the age of consent. He was seduced by his friends mother who is almost 3 times his age. He was going through a tough time, mixed up and vulnerable. This woman thought the teenager was going to inherit a lot of money when he turned 18. So she got herself pregnant. At first she didn't know who the father was because she had slept with other teens. Eventually she found out there wasn't going to be much money and got angry at the teen. All the boys were tested and the teenagers DNA matched. The child's name at birth was given her ex husbands last name. The birth certificate still reads her ex husbands name on it. She was asked to change the fathers name and the child's last name but of coarse the FOC never enforced it. She always played head games with the teen and used the child as a pawn out of meanness. The FOC got many complaints but never did anything about visitation. The mother rarely allowed visitation but when Christmas came around she always called to collect gifts. Finally this teen grew into a man. Tired of fighting to see his son he gave up. But the FOC always said pay pay pay. They raised support all the time but NEVER enforced visitation when there was a complaint. They made the father pay for child care which was never paid to the family member watching the child for free. The FOC never investigated the complaints. The mother has told the child story's that his father doesn't want to see him or cares about him. Now this child is convinced his father doesn't care about him or wants to have anything to do with him. But the FOC hasn't done a thing about this child's welfare. This wasn't the choice of a father loving and wanting to see his son. It was the choice the mother made and got away with all these years because the FOC has NEVER done the right thing and enforced visitation. The FOC should have stopped child support since the mother refuses to let her child have a relationship with his father. One day I pray this child finds his father and finds the truth. After all doesn't any child deserve to have BOTH parents in their life? No wonder there's so many dead beat dads out there. What about the lying dead beat mothers? Better yet the dead beat FOC for not doing their job in the first place.

Monday, September 24, 2007

Hearing on alleged school bus sex draws hundreds to meeting

Valerie Olander / The Detroit News

Hundreds of angry parents jammed the auditorium of the high school campus at 6 tonight after allegations of a sexual assault on a school bus involving three elementary-age boys last May came to light early last week.

An internal investigation last week by Superintendent Chuck Breiner turned up conflicting accounts of who knew what and when. Breiner was informed of the incident last Monday by a parent of one of the accused. The principal interviewed an 11-year-old boy named as a witness and then allowed the boy to talk to police without a parent's consent. The boy confessed to participating and was later charged.

Two boys, ages 9 and 11, are facing in Livingston Juvenile Court first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct charges and gross indecency between males involving allegedly forcing a 7-year-old to perform sex acts.

"This is something that's going to stick with my child to the day he dies," the father of the 7-year-old said during the meeting. He also called Breiner on Thursday to discuss the case and said Breiner "never called back."

"What kind of people do you have working for you," he asked the school board. He also said Southwest Elementary Principal Jill Hilla "should be fired."

Close to 50 staff members from Southwest Elementary School turned out to support Hilla, wearing T-shirts that read, "I support Jill Hilla" and stickers.

As many as two school principals, a transportation supervisor and the district's operations manager were aware of the incident when it was reported to police on May 31. No one informed central office administrators of the alleged crime or pursued disciplinary measures.

In addition, a Southwest principal waited two days after learning of the crime from the 7-year-old's mother before reporting the crime to authorities, according to police reports. Questions over how two videotapes from May 9 and May 24 emerged from the bus as evidence for police have added

scrutiny, as well as the identity of a substitute bus driver who was never interviewed by police or administrators.

The 9-year-old was suspended from school after a disciplinary hearing last week while another hearing is pending for the 11-year-old boy who was being home-schooled as of last week.

"No one is madder than I am about this," said school board member Dean Miller. "I promise you this is not going away. This is not going to be swept under the rug." Applause greeted his statements.

The board also told the crowd that, from now on, as the school bus empties on the way home, children will be redirected to the front of the bus, leaving the back of the bus empty.

The district also is considering using volunteer bus monitors, and will determine if such a move complies with their insurance policies.

Prosecutor David Morse and county Sheriff Bob Bezotte were in the crowd and spoke at the meeting, saying Hilla acted responsibly in reporting the incident to law enforcement.

You can reach Valerie Olander at (517) 552 5503 or volander@detnews.com.

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

Parents seek answers in bus sex assault Hundreds pack Howell town hall meeting to discuss attack on boy, 7.

Valerie Olander / The Detroit News

Hundreds of angry parents jammed the auditorium of the high school's Freshman Campus Monday night after allegations of a sexual assault on a school bus involving three elementary-age boys in May came to light early last week.

Many of their questions centered on why the accused youths were allowed to continue riding the bus and whether parents could learn when the youngsters would return to school.

"If these boys are reinstated, will we be notified what school?" Jennifer Dobb, the mother of a kindergartner, said during a special session before a regular meeting of the Howell Public Schools board.

Board members said they would rely on the advice of their legal counsel, whom they instructed to conduct an investigation and report back on Oct. 8.

An internal investigation last week by Superintendent Chuck Breiner turned up conflicting accounts of who knew what and when about the alleged assaults. Breiner was informed of the incident last Monday by a parent of one of the accused. The principal interviewed an 11-year-old boy named as a witness and then allowed the boy to talk to police without a parent's consent. The boy confessed to participating and was later charged.

Two boys, ages 9 and 11, are facing in Livingston Juvenile Court first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct charges and gross indecency between males involving allegedly forcing a 7-year-old to perform sex acts.

"This is something that's going to stick with my child to the day he dies," the father of the 7-year-old said during the meeting. He said he called Breiner on Thursday to discuss the case and Breiner "never called back."

"What kind of people do you have working for you," he asked the board. Southwest Elementary Principal Jill Hilla, he said, "should be fired."

Close to 50 staff members from Southwest turned out to support Hilla, wearing T-shirts that read, "I support Jill Hilla" and stickers.

As many as two school principals, a transportation supervisor and the district's operations manager were aware of the incident when it was reported to police on May 31. No one informed central office administrators of the alleged crime or pursued disciplinary measures until the last day of school, when the two students were suspended.

In addition, a Southwest principal waited two days after learning of the incident from the 7-year-old's mother before reporting it to authorities, according to police reports. Questions over how two videotapes from May 9 and May 24 emerged from the bus as evidence for police have added scrutiny, as well as the identity of a substitute bus driver who was never interviewed by police or administrators.

The 9-year-old was suspended from school after a disciplinary hearing last week while another hearing is pending for the 11-year-old boy who was being home-schooled as of last week.

"No one is madder than I am about this," said board member Dean Miller. "I promise you this is not going away. This is not going to be swept under the rug." Applause followed his statements.

The board also told the crowd that, from now on, as school buses empty taking children home, children will be moved to the front of the bus.

The district also is considering using volunteer bus monitors.

You can reach Valerie Olander at (517) 552 5503 or volander@detnews.com.

Parents hit school board over bus assault

Posted by Ann Arbor News [Staff Reporter Tom Tolen](#)

September 25, 2007 07:51AM

HOWELL - Parents vented their anger and school board trustees vowed to straighten out the mess during an emotional public forum Monday night, called after two young boys - ages 9 and 11 - were charged with sexually assaulting a 7-year-old on a [Howell school](#) bus.

The incident came to light last week after the suspects appeared in juvenile court. But police have been investigating the incident since May when it was reported to Southwest Elementary School Principal Jill Hilla, who called police.

But apparently the information was not reported to Superintendent Chuck Breiner or the school board.

One of the two boys has been suspended from school and the other is "voluntarily out of school pending the outcome of the prosecutorial process," said Deputy Superintendent for Labor Relations and Personnel Lynn Parrish. The two boys face criminal sexual conduct charges in juvenile court.

The victim is receiving psychological counseling, but has been scarred by the incident, his father said. The boy's father vented his anger and frustration, saying the other boys involved should have been immediately expelled from school.

"This is something that is going to stick with my child until the day he dies," he told the school board.

"I feel somebody dropped the ball," the father said, saying the Southwest principal should be fired. "You are trying to cover up something."

Others in the audience later came to Hilla's defense, and some wore T-shirts expressing support.

The father also chastised the board for its lack of knowledge about the incident until last week. "If, (for instance), it's a kid with a knife, the board is supposed to know about it," he said.

The incident was the latest in a series of episodes that have created unwanted headlines for the school district in the last couple of years. First it was the placement of a Diversity Club flag at Howell High School, which some perceived as promoting homosexuality. Then the Livingston Organization for Values in Education also attempted to have several books banned because of violent or sexual content.

More recently, there has been controversy over the decision to privatize custodial services, putting 38 custodians out of work, and over lengthy bus rides, that can go nearly two hours, for some students.

"I am concerned that we as a district are always involved in controversy, and I implore you as a board to find solutions," said parent Lori Mazzullo.

"In my view, this is greater than a Howell school problem, it's a microcosm of our society," said Merrill Lundgren of Brighton, a man who works with school children to build their self-esteem.

"Don't let your investigation stop with this incident," urged Vicki Fyke, founder of the LOVE group. "Older kids have problems with bullying and teasing and you've got to go across the board."

Board members also weighed in on the bus incident.

"I'd like to protect every child, and sometimes we can't do this," said board Secretary Sue Drazik. "We are going to get to the bottom of this, and this is something we can't do overnight."

Trustee Wendy Day said the board has lost the trust and confidence of the public that it once had. "We have a huge responsibility to regain that trust," Day said.

"I believe the board is committed to restoring that (level of public confidence)," said board Treasurer Ed Literski.

Breiner said the district has retained the services of its law firm to investigate the apparent communications breakdown. Attorneys will be interviewing seven district employees, from bus drivers to administrators, to find out what really happened, Breiner said.

A new policy instituted by the district Monday requires school bus passengers to shift toward the front as the bus empties. Some in the packed audience at the Howell Freshman Campus auditorium suggested the district allow parent volunteers ride on the buses to monitor students.

After the meeting, Breiner said he heard many messages from residents at the forum.

"I heard anger, frustration, a demand for change, a concern for the safety and welfare of children and, not least, the pain of the victim's parent," he said.

Tom Tolen can be reached at 810-844-2009 or ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com.

ClickOnDetroit.com

Bus Policy Reviewed After Sex Accusations

POSTED: 1:28 pm EDT September 24, 2007
UPDATED: 2:00 pm EDT September 24, 2007

Livingston County school officials will review the procedures for reporting cases of sexual assaults.

This comes after an alleged sexual assault involving children on a Howell school bus.

"We have reviewed our procedures," Dan Danosky, superintendent of Pinckney Community Schools told The Livingston Daily.

In the Howell incident, Danosky said, it appears reporting procedures seemed to have fallen apart.

"Of course, you never know until it falls apart whether you've been clear enough," he said.

Administrators in Brighton and Fowlerville schools have taken similar steps.

Two Howell elementary school boys, ages 9 and 11, have been charged with criminal sexual conduct on suspicion they made a 7-year-old boy perform oral sex on them on the school bus.

The incident allegedly took place in May, when the 7-year-old's father caught him attempting to make his brother perform a sex act in the bathroom of their home.

The boy eventually told police that a 9-year-old forced him to perform the act on the school bus.

Police said there is a videotape from the bus.

Howell Superintendent Chuck Breiner told Local 4 the tape doesn't show an assault.

"We will continue to collect tapes from those buses and review those tapes for incidents that are inappropriate or damaging to the bus or the kids on the bus," said Breiner.

The police report said one can make the assumption that one boy forced another's head into his lap.

In a second incident, police said the 11-year-old was involved by trying to conceal the act.

The father of the 11-year-old boy said his son witnessed the attacks and said his son was also a victim of a similar attack by the 9-year-old.

"We take it for granted our children are safe," the 38-year-old father said Monday. "We're worried about predators coming up to the bus stop, not being on the bus. How can you think our children are safe? The school should be accountable for what happens on the bus."

Breiner told WDIV that he had learned about the accusations on Monday when the 11-year-old boy's father called him to ask why his son was questioned by the principal and a police officer without his knowledge.

"I think we need to examine our supervisory protocol on buses. I think we need to examine our communication system inside," said Breiner.

Breiner released a press release Tuesday:

Howell Public Schools learned last May (from an elementary student's family) that alleged indecent exposure/sexual activity may have occurred on a district school bus. Three Howell Public Schools elementary male students may have been involved in these interactions. An elementary school official immediately contacted local police who investigated the allegations. Both City of Howell and later Livingston County Sheriff's Department personnel became involved in the ensuing investigation.

RELATED TO STORY



Video: Children Accused In Sex Crimes On Bus

Howell school-based- and transportation-officials learned of the activity after it was to have occurred: both school and transportation personnel cooperated fully with police-investigators, including turning over the bus tapes to the police. These tapes were from a bus ride taken after the date of the allegations. Howell Public School's busses contain video cameras which are available for the collection of images of student behaviors.

School officials believe that the alleged behavior may have occurred during the students' 38-minute afternoon bus ride. The boys may also have attended the same post-school-day child care program, causing them to ride the same afternoon bus. All three students continue to be enrolled in the district.

The parent of one of the students contacted the superintendent's office on Monday, Sept. 17; Superintendent Chuck Breiner met with the parent later that afternoon.

District administrators and the parent will meet in the near future to review issues leading to the allegations. District officials are reviewing communication, investigation and bus supervision protocol in response to the allegations the students face.

The Howell Public Schools District is both shocked and saddened by the content of these allegations, especially in the involvement of elementary-aged children. As a result of these allegations, the district remains intensely concerned for the safety and welfare of all of its students and their families. School staff and administrators are focus upon counseling and support that students may need as a result of the bus incident-allegations.

"I heard nothing about it. That's shocking," said an angry mother.

Prosecutors dropped initial charges against the 7-year-old for the attempted act upon his brother.

The 9-year-old boy's mother will not allow police to question her son.

The two younger boys are still attending school but are not riding the same bus, Breiner said.

Juvenile court records indicate the 9- and 11-year-old boys are each charged with first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

First-degree criminal sexual conduct, which means penetration, is a felony that for adults carries a maximum sentence of life in prison.

The two older boys are also charged with gross indecency between males.

The identities of the children are not being released because of their ages.

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House to vote on children's insurance bill

Associated Press - September 25, 2007 3:13 AM ET

CAPITOL HILL (AP) - The House is set to defy a presidential veto threat and approve an expansion of a popular children's health insurance program.

The bill, agreed to by House and Senate negotiators, calls for a \$35 billion expansion of the program, which expires on Sunday.

The money would come from increased tobacco taxes, including a hike in the federal cigarette tax to \$1 per pack. That's a 61 cent jump.

President Bush is willing to go along with a five million dollar expansion.

The bill is expected to pass the House today, though probably not with enough votes to override a veto.

The program is designed to provide health coverage to families who make too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but can't afford private coverage.

It currently covers six million children. The expansion would raise that to 10 million.

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Children not to be used as political bargaining chips

By: Rebecca Murtha

Posted: 9/25/07

Imagine being a child and not being able to take medicine when you have a cold. Imagine breaking your leg and your parents have to take out a second mortgage to pay for the medical bills. Imagine making just enough money to not qualify for Medicaid without having enough money to pay for private health insurance. Imagine getting the flu and having to go without treatment simply because your parents can't afford health insurance.

For millions of American children, this is a reality according to NBC. These millions have relied on the government to be their saving grace. And soon, the saving grace of these children will come to an end.

This coming Sunday, the State Children's Health Insurance Program will expire. For those that don't know what the SCHIP program is, here are some basic facts. The SCHIP program was started to allow children whose parents don't qualify for Medicaid but can't afford private insurance access to medical care. The federal government allocates money to the states for the SCHIP program, and then has discretion with how to use it. SCHIP currently serves 6.6 million children nationwide, with millions more in need of medical care.

Congress has recently introduced a bill that would raise the SCHIP allocations to \$35 billion in about five years. Doing so would expand the reach of SCHIP in caring for more children. The expansion would also add about four million more people into SCHIP's program.

Funding for the expanded SCHIP program would come in the way of raising the federal cigarette tax. The tax currently stands at 61 cents per carton and the proposed legislation would raise it to \$1 per carton. While some could argue that this is a discriminatory tax, it isn't. I hate to be politically incorrect, but the whole world knows that cigarettes kill. Each puff you take is a puff closer to cancer. Charging extra money for health care when one buys an item that has known carcinogens is fittingly ironic in my opinion. Forgive me for getting off topic for a little bit. This is about health care, not the known by-products of cigarettes.

This new bill is set to go to a vote on Tuesday and is supported by Democrats and Republicans alike. The bill will allow more children to get health insurance, as well as put American on the path to universal health care, a move which several countries have successfully utilized. The entirety of Europe has some form of universal health care, as well as our neighbor to the north, Canada.

Of course, I would not be writing this column if there was not some problem with the possible SCHIP expansion. The problem is as follows: President Bush has already promised to veto the bill.

President Bush says the proposed bill costs too much money, unfairly raises taxes and allows those who can afford private health insurance to mooch off the government. While I could see his point if we were providing health insurance to drug addicts who refuse to do something else (I wouldn't agree but I can understand), I cannot see the point of denying health insurance to children. Children can't afford anything on their own, and we shouldn't punish them because their parents can't buy health care. At least, that's the gist of President Bush's argument.

Of course, it's okay to spend \$12 million an HOUR for the war in Iraq, but spending a fraction of that on child health care is horrific.

The President proposed a simple extension of the current program instead of the expansion.

"Members of Congress are risking health coverage for poor children purely to make a political point," said Bush. Of course it's a political point when it's backed by the two major political parties. It couldn't be that Congress is finally making a decision together in the best interests of children.

Well President Bush, the only person trying to make a political point is you. Children are the future of America and it is our job to take care of them. Someday you'll realize that children are not a bargaining chip in the world of politics.

Rebecca Murtha, a Western Herald opinion columnist, is a sophomore majoring in journalism and can be reached via e-mail at rebeccamurtha@hotmail.com.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Infant death rates fall, but race a factor

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

By Linda S. Mah

lmah@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8546

Even as Michigan's overall infant-mortality rate declined last year, significant disparities between the survival rates of black babies and white babies persisted.

The latest state data on infant-mortality rates was unveiled Monday at Borgess Medical Center at the conference "Family -- Mind, Body, Spirit: Mapping the Future." About 130 people attended.

Dr. Gregory Holzman, chief medical executive for the Michigan Department of Community Health, delivered the infant-mortality data.

"On a positive note, all of the numbers are going down," he said. "But on a negative note, we still see huge disparities."

In 2006, the state's overall infant-mortality rate fell from 7.9 deaths in 2005 to 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births -- the lowest rate in the state's history. The most recent national data from 2005 put the infant-mortality rate at 6.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.

However, white babies in the state continue to fare better than black babies. The infant-mortality rate for white babies in 2006 was 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, down from 5.5 deaths, compared to 14.8 deaths for black babies, down from 17.9 deaths.

The national rate for white babies last year was 5.7 deaths per 1,000 live births; for blacks, 13.8 deaths.

"Hopefully, it is not just a blip, but a continuing trend down," Holzman said of the declining death rate for Michigan's black babies. "There is a lot of work to be done."

Dr. Arthur James, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Borgess Women's Health and one of the organizers of the conference, said the state numbers are encouraging -- especially in terms of black infants, where there was a 17 percent improvement.

"What makes the drop so significant for us is that it was accomplished against a backdrop of a poor economy," James said. "Usually, there is a direct relationship between infant-mortality rate and economy."

That trend is also reflected in Kalamazoo County numbers. From 2004 to 2006, the average infant-mortality rate for black babies was 16 deaths per 1,000 live births, compared to an average 17.9 deaths from 2003 to 2005 and 20.8 deaths from 2002 to 2004. The state looks at three-year averages.

Holzman said he hopes the state can reach an infant-mortality rate of 4.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, a goal of Healthy People 2010, a national health project. Many other countries, such as Japan, Finland and France, already have better infant-mortality rates than 4.5 deaths, Holzman said.

Holzman suggested a two-pronged approach to improving survival for Michigan babies:

- Caregivers need to work with women before and during pregnancy to address issues such as smoking, prenatal care, reducing unintended pregnancies and alcohol and drug use.
- When women are identified as high-risk pregnancies, every effort needs to be made to ensure they receive specialized care and deliver at facilities with neonatal intensive-care units.

Also speaking at the conference was Dr. James Collins, a professor of pediatrics at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University. Collins' research has focused on the disparity between black and white infant-mortality rates.

Although some have suggested that genetics may play a factor in the disparity between black and white infant-death rates, Collins said his research discounts that. Instead, he said, he believes the rates reflect national socioeconomic and race issues.

Calling it the ``weathering phenomenon," Collins said the black women who have lifelong experiences with low income, racism and pervasive inequalities could be experiencing a level of stress that ultimately affects their babies.

``The long-standing racial disparity in infant outcomes cries out for fresh analysis that takes into account the random, pervasive and multifaceted inequality that is bound up in the historic context of race and begin to capture its effects on human beings over time," Collins said.

On the Web

For more information on infant deaths, visit www.michigan.gov/mdch and search ``infant mortality rates."

By the numbers

n Kalamazoo County's average infant-mortality rate for black babies continued to drop, from 20.8 deaths per 1,000 live births for 2002-04 to 16 deaths in 2004-06.

n Michigan's infant-mortality rate for white babies in 2006 was 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, down from 5.5 deaths, compared to 14.8 deaths for black babies, down from 17.9 deaths.

n Michigan's overall infant-mortality rate in 2006 fell to 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births from 7.9 deaths in 2005.

n The national rate in 2005 for white babies per 1,000 live births was 5.7 deaths; for blacks, 13.8 deaths.

SOURCE: Michigan Department of

Community Health

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Man stabbed, wife jailed

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

GRAND RAPIDS -- A Grand Rapids woman was jailed after she allegedly stabbed her husband in the chest during an argument Monday night, police Lt. Vincent Reilly said. The 46-year-old victim was taken to Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus with an injury that was not believed to be life-threatening, but investigators said the knife may have struck the man's lung. Authorities responded to the couple's apartment, at 1378 Dewberry Place NE, about 10:19 p.m. Police have been called to the apartment before for physical and verbal altercations.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Detroit Launches Water Assistance Program

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DETROIT -- A program aimed at Detroit residents who need assistance with their water bills launched Monday.

Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) have collaborated to develop a Water Assistance Program to help low-income Detroit residents manage their water and sewerage bills.

"The interagency partnership between water and human services ensures low-income Detroiters can receive uninterrupted water and sewerage services in the next Detroit," said Kilpatrick.

Eligible customers for the Detroit Residential Water Assistance Program will receive a credit on their monthly water bill; however, they will be required to pay any existing balance.

Eligible residents must be Detroit residents who live in a single-family residence and must be at or below the federal poverty income guidelines. Also, residents utility must be either disconnected or pending disconnection.

"We have fulfilled the promise made last year to create and implement a water bill assistance program," said Kilpatrick.

Residents who meet program requirements may apply for assistance at any DHS Service Centers.

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MORNING SUN

Gratiot commission set to make cuts

By ROSEMARY HORVATH
Sun Staff Writer

Gratiot County Commissioners will officially lower the boom on numerous budget reductions today nearing a total of \$550,000.

At the meeting which begins at the unusual hour of 6 p.m., commissioners will consider permitting the parks and recreation commission to hire a part-time parks operations supervisor with parks millage revenue, eliminating health benefits for the three road commissioners while upping their annual salary, and fulfilling a request from the Friend of the Court to hold tight.

Friend of the Court Gary Haffey has asked the county to fund a position in his office through Dec. 31, or at least until a decision is reached as to whether the county can use federal incentive dollars as part of a match to pay for the position.

County Administrator Brian Smith said the matter is being discussed in committee at the state level. The county would pay \$4,000 for the position.

Among the budget reductions are cutting or eliminating memberships, travel and training requests. The sheriff's department saved the county more than \$150,000 by having the road millage pay for two more road patrol slots.

The prosecutor's office has opted to pay salary and benefits for one position through grants. District court has increased fees for revenue to generate \$50,000 more. A supervisor position for building and grounds was cut as was dental coverage for elected officials and department heads.

Roughly, around \$100,000 will be withdrawn from the delinquent tax revolving fund to balance the budget.

In the current budget drawing to a close, Smith had to lower the revenue expectation of selling 10 police cruisers and buying eight new ones. The \$70,000 expected in revenue fell short by \$21,000. This is mainly due to the sheriff's department hanging on to the Expeditions for a while longer, Brian said, that will save the county money in the long run.

Attorney fees for labor negotiations were \$9,000 over the budgeted amount of \$55,000. A final audit will provide an exact amount, Brian added.

Even the mileage line item for the Board of Commission jumped from \$2,500, to \$4,000, and finally \$6,500.

Smith said the initial amount was "an unrealistic number" to begin with. Commissioners receive 48.5 cents per mile (IRS rate) when they travel for county business.

Gratiot had to cough up more than \$36,000 to pay for child care as determined by the Department of Human Services, formerly Family Independence Agency. The total expense came in at \$96,276, of which the county has no control, Smith said.

Smith headed up the county administration mid-year and had little to do with the fiscal year's budget. Last year the general fund could not repay a sizeable loan from the delinquent tax fund. The loan made this summer of \$600,000 will be repaid, or so Smith would like to see, he said. This picture will become cleared when the auditor closes on the books before year end.

He said the uncertainty makes him nervous. The loan could become “a permanent transfer if we don’t have enough to repay it,” Smith said.

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